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Homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, April 28, 1943

SUBJECT: "WHERE OUR FOOD IS GOING." Information from Food Distribution officials of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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You have been reading and hearing about the rationing of food ever since war broke out in Europe in 1939. The Germans began rationing butter, sugar, fats and other foods before their soldiers invaded Poland. England came around to rationing a short time later. Every country at war has had to make rationing part of its war program. But though Americans heard about rationing abroad, many of them felt it couldn't happen here. America had everything in foodstuffs--more than Americans could eat. But when war finally came to America, the need for rationing came, too.

Because of rationing and food shortages, you may have been wondering: "Where is our food going?" "How much is going to our allies, and how much to our armed forces?" "How much is really left here for us at home?"

First, let's look at the foods going to our allies known as "Lend-Lease". Some people have the idea that our food shortages have come from shipments to England and Russia. But all told, the food shipped to our allies last year was less than 6 percent of our entire production of food. The amount of canned vegetables that went to our allies totaled only eight-tenths of one percent of our supply..canned fruit came to one and seven-tenths of our supply ...and meat, mostly pork, amounted to just 6 percent of our supply.

Here are some Lend-Lease figures for January and February of this year. The beef this country shipped to Russia and Great Britain together amounted to less than a quarter of an ounce a week for each of us in the United States.

We sent 141 out of every thousand of our eggs...170 pounds out of every thousand pounds of our dried beans..and of milk products--cheese, dry milk and evaporated milk--we sent an equivalent of 18 quarts out of every thousand quarts of our milk. What butter we shipped went to Russia for their wounded soldiers. The total shipments were at a rate less than 6 pounds out of every thousand pounds of our 1942 supply. This means that each one of us here in the United States gave up a quarter of an ounce of food to send to our allies. You can see from this that the food we send to our allies could not cause the shortages of food we are having today.

And while we're on the subject of Lend-Lease shipments, let's remember that they work both ways. Our allies are helping us, too. England is supplying our troops with flour and many other things that would take millions of ship tons for us to send from here. American soldiers in the South Pacific are getting food from Australia and New Zealand. These countries supplied our troops with more beef and veal than the total beef and veal shipped under Lend-Lease last year. Also, these countries are furnishing our soldiers in the Solomons, New Guinea and New Caledonia with large supplies of eggs, milk and potatoes.

And now about the food going to our boys in uniform. All branches of our armed forces have expanded greatly in the last 2 years. These men need more and more food. Because of their strenuous life they eat more than they did in civilian life. Officials estimate that a soldier eats about a half ton more food a year than he did at home. That will give you some idea of how much food our larger armed forces need. But at that, only about 7 percent of our total production of food last year went to our men in arms. And while the demands of our armed forces and allies were heavy last year, so was the production of food. Farmers raised more food to make up for the heavier demand. And this year Agriculture officials estimate that civilians will have only 6 percent less food than they had last year.

Now you are probably asking: "Then why are we having food shortages?" The answer is: The much heavier demand for food on the home front. Civilians are working harder and eating more. Civilians are making more money than in recent years so they have more money to spend on meat, butter and other foods. In fact, civilian incomes have become so much larger that civilians alone in this country want to buy more food than there is. It is civilian money and civilian buying of food that is actually the reason for food shortages--not the food going to our military forces and allies.

And this brings us back to rationing. Rationing was necessary because of the larger demand for food on the home front so that each person can have a fair share. Without rationing some people would buy more than their share; others would have nothing. Nothing would be left for others to buy. War workers especially would be at a disadvantage because they are at factories all day and have only evenings for shopping.

Stop and read the reasons for rationing summed up at the back of your ration book, if you haven't read them already. "Rationing," says your book, "is part of our country's war effort. This is your Government's guarantee of your fair share of goods made scarce by war, to which the stamps contained herein will be assigned as the need arises. Any attempt to violate the rules is an effort to deny someone his share and will create hardship and discontent. Such action, like treason helps the enemy. Give your whole support to rationing and thereby conserve our vital goods. Be guided: 'If you don't need it, don't buy it.' "